Using Facebook as a Communication Tool in Agricultural-Related Social Movements

Mica Graybill-Leonard, Courtney Meyers, David Doerfert and Erica Irlbeck

Abstract

A social movement is a personal obligation taken on by an individual, due to either a personal experience or responsibility, to pursue action to implement a change in a community or society. Facebook is a social networking device in which users interact through conversations, and build relationships by networking with other users. Facebook groups are created as part of a smaller community within the social networking site and focus on particular interests or beliefs about certain issues. The purpose of this study was to determine why individuals use social media, specifically Facebook, to communicate information in social movements related to agricultural issues. Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with Facebook group administrators who actively contribute to the promotion of an agricultural-related social movement. Results indicated that Facebook was a beneficial communication tool to help the social movements reach more individuals. The Facebook group administrators were motivated to become involved with the social movement due to personal experiences. Although Facebook is the primary method used to reach target audience members, the participants said they use a variety of other communication channels. Additional research should explore other social movements to determine the impact social media has on communication efforts.

Introduction/Theoretical Framework

Communication is often cited for its role in creating change and has been used since the beginning of time to relay information, implement knowledge and skill, manipulate views and beliefs, and develop connections and relationships among people (Rogers, 2003; King, 2003). Communication has played a major role in facilitating change in agriculture in the past and suggests how new social media technologies could be used to advance agriculture, as well as to relay up-to-date information to agricultural specialists (Anderson-Wilk, 2009).

Advancements in agriculture and technology have generated a crucial need for the industry to effectively communicate agriculture and issues to the public (Roth, Vogt, & Weinheimer, 2002). This communication about agricultural issues is often in the form of social movements. Social movements can be defined as personal responsibilities or commitments, initially created by a leader or an experi-

This article is based on a paper previously presented at the 2011 Association for Communication Excellence in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Life and Human Sciences Conference.

ence, in which a strong belief is held and action is taken to attempt to implement change (Gerlach & Hine, 1970). Local advocacy communication, a subset of social movement communication, includes efforts of advocates to communicate through publications, mailings, mass media, the Internet, inter-personal contact, meetings, phone calls, demonstrations, and other media (McHale, 2004).

Communication through online communities and social media websites has sparked one of the most significant social developments society is yet to know (Experian Marketing Services, 2010). Social media sites are Internet- and mobile-based tools for sharing information, interacting, and building relationships among individuals. Forms of social media include blogging, podcasting, video blogging, and other various social networks. Each of these is designed to give society a way to reach out and connect with others. Brogan (2010) said people like to engage in social media to feel like they are being heard and that their thoughts and feelings are respected. Some social media and net-working websites are broad and attract diverse audiences while others focus specifically on certain hobbies and interests. Sites also vary in the communication tools they offer to users including mobile connectivity, blogging, and photo/video sharing (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Facebook is one of the most popular and universal social media and networking sites (Kabani, 2010). In 2010, Facebook active user numbers increased to more than 500 million. Users spend an average of 20 minutes a day engaging in the site and at least half of the entire Facebook population logs in once a day (Kabani, 2010). Facebook can be divided into four main parts: profiles, groups, pages, and events. Profiles are how people represent themselves to others. Users make their profile pages unique to their own style, interests, and creativity. Groups are created by users and allow them to take part in smaller communities within Facebook that support certain interests or beliefs that are shared by others. Once individuals engage in groups and become active members, they have the ability to receive information that may not be available to them in any other form. Facebook groups also give these individuals the chance to participate in other activities and come across opportunities they otherwise may not have had (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009).

A 2009 American Farm Bureau Federation survey of young farmers and ranchers found 46% of young (aged 18-35) farmers and ranchers who use computers regularly interact in some form of social media (Hoffman, 2009). These producers used Twitter, a social networking site, to share news from around the farm (Hoffman, 2009). Google Maps and Google Earth are being used to help farmers plot their land (Hest, 2008). Agriculturalists use video-sharing sites such as YouTube to post videos, commercials, news packages, and documentaries (Bradshaw, 2009).

The theoretical framework used in this study combined intentional social change theory, so-cial capital theory, computer mediated communication theory (CMC), and uses and gratifications theory. Intentional social change theory addresses a change agent's attempt to bring about proposed change with specific objectives and goals (Sato, 2006). A change agent is an individual who influ-ences people's opinions regarding their decision-making process about innovation in a direction that is considered desirable by the change agent or its company (Rogers, 2003). Intentional social change theory states that people use their own ideas and thoughts to manipulate the actions and opinions of others in a way that the outcome is seen as beneficial. Four main characteristics of social change are: 1) it happens everywhere, but the rate at which change actually occurs varies from place to place; 2) social change is most often intentional, but it is almost always unplanned; 3) social change creates controversy among individuals, organizations, or societies at large; and 4) some changes have more significance than others (Macionis, 2001).

The second theory applied in this study was social capital theory. Social capital is a concept most

often used to refer to social economic status and how people use their resources to succeed. It is the knowledge and experiences that have been gained from being members in particular social groups or organizations, jobs that have been offered because of a certain status or contact, or even just contacts who are referred to as a friend of a friend (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Social capital is often associated with networking because it states that the people we know and keep in contact with will enhance our social status through material or social gain. Woolcock and Narayan (2000) said social capital refers to the "norms and networks that enable people to act collectively" (p. 3). This applies to individuals and whole groups or organizations as well. Research conducted over the past two decades (Foley & Edwards, 1999; Woolcock, 1998) indicated that social capital can be used a number of ways in order to gain different benefits, such as engaging in social media to build personal relationships or networking with co-workers to improve working conditions.

The third theory used, computer-mediated communication (CMC), encompasses the use of networks of computers and technologies to aid in interaction and communication. These technologies include, but are not limited to, e-mail, discussion boards and forums, instant messaging capabilities, computer video conferencing, and other online databases (Romiszowski & Mason, 1996). Research has implied that CMC can create change in the way people communicate and interact with one another and can influence certain communication patterns and social networks (Fulk & Collins-Jarvis, 2001). This statement basically implies that CMC leads to social effects. CMC sets the foundation and creates structure for social relations. It is also the gap between relations that occur and the tool that individuals use to bridge that gap (Jones, 1995).

The final theory used in this study's theoretical framework was uses and gratifications. Uses and gratifications theory attempts to explain the uses and functions of media for individuals, groups, and society. This theory basically discusses why people choose particular media to fulfill certain needs. People choose their own media consumption so they may incorporate it in their lives in a way most beneficial to them. Users are goal-oriented in their media consumption and application. This theory suggests that media compete with other sources of information in order to fulfill the user's gratifications (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). Blumler and Katz (1974) conducted the first research to explain the connections between the audience's motives, media gratifications, and outcomes. In more recent years, with the arrival of the Internet, the perspective and study of uses and gratifications and the role the theory plays in people's lives is even more relevant (Bumgarner, 2007). Audiences have an important responsibility when obtaining messages from the Internet because they are actively seeking to receive certain information (Bryant & Zillman, 2002).

Many studies involving Facebook discuss how uses and gratifications theory can be applied. Bumgarner (2007) found college students use Facebook to follow their friends' profiles and to keep up with what their friends were doing. Joinson (2008) found Facebook users develop a variety of uses and gratifications from social networking sites, including traditional content gratification, communication, and surveillance. Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) evaluated the impact that social networking sites, particularly MySpace and Facebook, have on college students. The majority of students were using these social networking sites to build new relationships and maintain existing relationships. Results also indicated several gratifications were met including making new friendships, keeping in contact with old friends, or using Facebook as a marketing or promotional tool (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008).

Purpose and Objectives

Research Priority 2 in the *National Research Agenda (NRA): American Association for Agricultural Education's Research Priority Areas for 2011-2015* (Doerfert, 2011) recognizes the need to examine the "challenges and opportunities brought about by rapidly advancing technologies" and "evolving consumer demands, needs, and behaviors" (p. 8). The purpose of this study was to determine why individuals use social media, specifically Facebook, to communicate information in social movements related to agricultural issues. To achieve that purpose, the following research objectives were used:

1. Describe the characteristics of the participants of the Facebook groups that address social movements related to agricultural issues.
2. Describe each participant's motivation to become involved with the social movement.
3. Describe how communication channel decisions were made to promote the social movement.

Methods & Procedures

To address the research objectives, a descriptive, qualitative research approach was implemented using in-depth interviews with the administrators of eight selected Facebook groups that discuss social movements in agriculture. A qualitative study was determined to be the most effective approach to obtain the quality of answers and information needed for the study. Qualitative research is research about a "person's lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, feelings, and feelings about organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 11).

Participants in the study were purposively selected. Purposeful sampling occurs when a researcher specifically selects participants because of their characteristics and knowledge on the topic being researched (Morse & Richards, 2002). The purpose of the study was to locate groups that represented agricultural issues, so individuals with only personal Facebook pages were not selected for the study. Researchers established selection criteria prior to searching Facebook for participants. In order to be considered for this study, groups had to be supportive of agriculture, have at least 1,000 members, been updated several times within the past month with current news or information, and the administrator of the group had to be involved with posting most of the information (as opposed to members of the group).

To begin the sampling process, a search was conducted on Facebook using the following keywords: "agriculture," "farming," "ranching," and "animals." Many results were immediately eliminated from participation in the study because they were either electronic spam (the abuse of electronic messaging systems and solicitation through Web services) or did not meet criteria set by the researcher. Using the established criteria, the returned results were evaluated to identify the Facebook groups that were relevant to the study. Each selected participant was the Facebook group administrator. While the participants represented different sectors of the agricultural industry, they all supported their agricultural topics instead of opposing them.

Once the potential participants were identified, they were initially contacted using the Facebook e-mail-messaging tool, followed by an e-mail recruitment letter. Additional participants were identified using a snowball technique in which the potential participants recommended other people they knew who might participate in the study. Through their recommendations, the researcher contacted four others through the Facebook e-mail-messaging tool. Once participants agreed to be interviewed and provided their phone number, the lead researcher contacted them to further explain the study and schedule a time for the interview. Before beginning the actual interview, all participants

agreed to verbal informed consent information. Table 1 shows the different types of groups that were involved in the study, and provides a pseudonym to protect the participant's identity.

Table 1
Characteristics of Facebook Group Administrators

Pseudonym	Mission	Members in Group
Shawn & Jill	Watching practices of the United States Humane Society	167,550
Jeremiah	Taking a stand against the agenda of the United States Humane Society	18,071
Mark	Shares the importance of telling agriculture's story	11,611
Dustin	Created for people to share all aspects of agriculture	4,331
Blake	A place to connect with farmers and ranchers	2,334
James	A place for farmers and ranchers to connect with communities using social media	1,848
Katherine	Aim to improve media's perception of U.S. agriculture	1,631

Note. Membership numbers were as of September 24, 2010.

A panel of experts familiar with qualitative research and in-depth interviewing reviewed the questioning guide composed of 30 questions. Wording, structure, and order were carefully considered when creating the questions in order to obtain detailed answers from respondents, as well as to ensure that no questions would be seen as biased. Between the dates of September 6, 2010, and September 20, 2010, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted by telephone with participants who lived across the United States. Each interview was conducted using the same questioning guide and lasted approximately 45 minutes.

The telephone interviews were recorded using a digital recording device and hand-written notes. The lead researcher transcribed each of the interviews then analyzed the results using NVivo 8.0 (a data management software designed to help store and analyze qualitative data). The interview transcripts were coded for common themes and categories.

Findings
Objective 1: Describe the characteristics of the participants of the Facebook groups that address social movements related to agricultural issues.

Each of the participants was an administrator of a Facebook group that represented social movements related to agriculture. Three of the eight participants were paid to administer their Facebook group as a part of their jobs. The other participants started their Facebook groups and volunteer their time to the group. In order to gain a better understanding of the study's participants, demographic questions asked age, gender, and geographical location. The mean age was 30; the median age was

28; the mode was 40. Six of the participants were male and two were female. Although all the participants represented Facebook groups within the United States, the geographic locations varied. Three of the participants resided in Washington D.C., while the other five participants lived in different locations across the United States: Arkansas, Missouri, South Dakota, Ohio, and California.

The participants had either completed a bachelor's degree or master's degree, or were in the process of completing a bachelor's degree. Participants were also asked to give a brief explanation of their professional background. All of the participants were involved with the agricultural industry either directly or indirectly; five of the participants were producers in the agricultural industry, while the other three were employed in the industry by an agricultural organization.

During the interviews, participants were also asked when their Facebook groups were formed. Each of the Facebook groups was formed within the last two years – the oldest was started in April 2009 and the most recent started in May 2010. The majority of participants had been their group's administrator since the group was founded. Most participants indicated that their primary responsibility to their Facebook group was to update the page with new information and content, and to monitor what members post. Some participants also said they create links between the articles and information posted to Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and websites. Several participants responded that their main concern is to inform people about important issues. One participant said his mission was to "keep members motivated and communicating about agriculture."

Objective 2: Describe each participant's motivation to become involved with the social movement.

A dominant theme of what first motivated the participants to become involved in the cause they were advocating was personal experiences. For some participants, this experience was a negative one that affected them and being involved in the social movement or cause helped them tell the other side of the story and share their own experiences. One participant said he had a videographer tape a farm near his family's farm and then expose the footage in a negative light. Blake said: "About five years ago, some anti-ag activists got some undercover video of a farm we knew well. I then realized how quickly and easily they could turn the perception of farm life around into a negative aspect."

Five of eight participants said they are invested in their cause because it is something that has been instilled in them their entire lives. Mark said: "For us, supporting this cause is very personal. Both my wife and I have grown up around agriculture, and we love it very much." Other participants commented about farming and ranching being their livelihood for as long as they can remember; having grown up around agriculture has instilled a passion and motivation to promote the industry. Jeremiah said, "When it comes to agriculture, it is something I have been a supporter of my whole life."

Another theme for motivation for involvement in the cause is the desire to see the movement succeed in the future. Several participants mentioned that they are involved in actively promoting their cause for their children and future generations to come. The overall message from participants was that if they do not fight in favor of agriculture now, future generations will suffer, which means that it will affect their children. Blake said, "Agriculture is something that, like most farmers, I really enjoy and at very least, I try to make sure when I have kids someday that they have the same opportunities that I did."

Participants were asked to describe how they are committed to their cause. Several participants commented that the most important way is their effort to make sure consumers and producers have

the most accurate facts and information. Participants said they can stop rumors from being started if they actively continue to advocate and give people information. Participants also noted they like to have face-to-face conversations with people to advocate for their cause because having actual conversations with people can encourage interest. Jeremiah said: "It's just talking to them and seeing what they actually know. Then it's my duty to give them the basic facts and encourage them to do what they can in support of agriculture."

Participants said their commitment to their cause involves sharing their story with others so people like them will want to share their story as well. Participants said the Facebook groups are a good opportunity to encourage agriculturalists to take a stand for a cause that affects them personally.

Specific emotions or opinions urged participants to become involved in their movement or cause. Participants said they were angry when people do not know the facts behind agriculture and fight against the industry. Shawn said, "I get angry when I see these things that are unfounded coming from people who have absolutely no idea what it's like being a farmer."

Several participants said they feel sympathy for those in agriculture who are being targeted by those who oppose agricultural practices. Katherine said, "It is a terrible feeling when there is an attack on people and the industry from people who are uneducated."

In order to better understand why the participants were using Facebook for their causes, they were first asked why they personally joined Facebook. Participants said the decision was due to social pressures to communicate and stay in touch with family and friends. They said Facebook is a good way to stay in contact with people, to network, and to meet new people. Another reason for personally joining Facebook was for professional use. Some participants said they thought joining would be a good tool to embrace for their careers.

When asked what motivated them to use Facebook to promote their movement or cause, participants indicated that Facebook actually allowed their cause to exist. The creation of the Facebook groups provided a communication channel for the promotion of the social movement. None of the social movements in this study existed before the creation of the Facebook groups. Because the participants had been using Facebook for personal reasons, they were familiar with how groups could be used to promote or support their cause. They applied that knowledge to create their own Facebook groups for their social movements.

In addition, participants said they chose Facebook because many other organizations were already using it and so many people were already participating in this social networking site. The visible success of other Facebook groups encouraged the participants to utilize Facebook to promote their causes. Shawn said:

> We first looked at Facebook to see what other people were doing. One thing is PETA had something like 650,000 Facebook fans, and at the time I thought, "They are exceptionally good at organizing grassroots." I thought that was an impressive number of people to reach through technology.

To participants in this study, Facebook seemed to provide the most efficient forum for people who wanted to engage in issues and discussions about the movement or cause. People need a place to talk to others who share the same beliefs, and participants said Facebook had the most users within their target population. Jill said:

A lot of people who are fans of ours are actually the older demographic, which is currently the fastest growing demographic on Facebook. They are finding out that it's a way they can get online and engage in issues they care about.

Objective 3: Describe how communication channel decisions were made to promote the social movement.

Participants used several communication tools to promote their causes. Along with Facebook, participants used Twitter, YouTube, blogs, websites, podcasts, articles, newsletters, and word of mouth. Participants said they are not limited to any one communication channel; they will use anything that can be effective in spreading their message. When asked why each participant chose particular communication channels to communicate with their members, the most common theme was that the tools being used are free. Some of the Facebook groups are non-profit and do not have available funding to advertise. Many of the social media platforms and online communication forums are free, so organizations are not hurting themselves by trying each one out to see which, if any, will be most effective. Shawn said, "We are always measuring the efficiency of communication vehicles in terms of 'cost per click' or 'cost per eyeball.'"

Another common theme was that the communication tools were well-known among the target audience, and were already being used by many different people. Katherine said, "We chose the communication channels we use because they are the most well known and have the most users, which makes them most applicable to us." Participants indicated that they were already noticing who was using the communication channels, which had a major impact on which ones were chosen. Overall, participants agreed that the chosen communication channels were effective in promoting their social movements. Shawn said, "If something wasn't working for us, we wouldn't be wasting our time with it. We would have already moved on and tried something else that would get the job done."

When evaluating the effectiveness of Facebook as a communication channel, the determining factor for participants was the number of users who were already on Facebook. Blake explained: "The biggest factor for me was the fact that there were already 500 million users on Facebook. That shows that it's a place where people are going for information." Others said the number of users was an obvious reason for them to utilize Facebook. With so many people already on Facebook, it seemed that information provided on the site in support of causes or movements would reach people one way or another. Jeremiah said: "You put stuff out there, and people are going to find it. If they believe in it, they are going to follow it. It obviously reaches a large number of people; there is no question in that."

Another indicator of Facebook's effectiveness was the number of people who were urging the participants to take part in it. Participants said that if other organizations were urging its use, and they had been successful in their efforts, then it would be a good tool to embrace. Blake said: "If you look at a lot of anti-agriculture groups, they are using those tools as free PR and actually to further spread their message. If they are making use of it, it should be the same for us."

Participants promoted their Facebook groups by inviting friends and people through the friend finder tool. This method is quick and relatively simple, and has been an effective way for some of the participants to get a jump-start on promoting their movement through Facebook. Some participants also used any advertising they could afford as a way to promote their Facebook groups. Several participants commented they promote their Facebook groups on their YouTube or Twitter accounts, especially if they are targeting the same audience through both social media sites.

When participants were asked how frequently their groups were maintained, they agreed that updates to Facebook groups should be made no less than two times a week. Some participants said it was important to update the Facebook page as often as possible (Shawn indicated that he posts every couple of hours) while some participants said posting too often could be counter-productive. Participants said that when new information is posted on the group's Facebook page, members most often comment and respond to information if it is something they view as important and care about. Several participants agreed there are key players who are very active and comment often while many members visit the group's page and get information, but may never make a comment. When asked how trustworthy the information is on Facebook pages, participants indicated they closely monitored information being posted by others to make sure the information is accurate and is not negative toward the mission of the cause or movement. Some participants said they had others help them monitor and update their Facebook group's posts.

Conclusions, Implications, & Recommendations

Overall, participants represented different demographic characteristics related to age, gender, and geographical location. The average age of participants was 30, and six of the eight participants were male. Participants' geographic locations were representative of various regions across the United States. When speaking in terms of educational backgrounds, all participants either had a college degree or were in the process of obtaining a degree. All of the participants were involved with the agricultural industry, either directly or indirectly. Each of the Facebook groups had been created within the last two years, and the participants were the key representatives of each group either as administrator, founder, or both. Participants' responsibilities for managing their Facebook group included maintaining the page, updating new information frequently, and monitoring what was posted.

As Anderson-Wilk (2009) said, communication has had a significant influence in facilitating change in agriculture in the past and new social media technologies could be used to advance agriculture in the future. Social movements in agriculture are necessary to advocate on behalf of strongly held beliefs or actions. These advocacy movements utilize various forms of communication (McHale, 2004) including social networking sites that allows members to reach out, connect with others, and feel like they are being heard (Brogan, 2010). Those involved in agricultural pursuits are using social networking sites to share and find information (Bradshaw, 2009; Hest, 2008; Hoffman, 2009).

Participants in this study feel strongly about their cause or movement because of experiences, emotions, and opinions. Intentional social change theory recognizes the role these change agents (Rogers, 2003) have in using their own ideas and actions to influence people's opinions in order to bring about the desired change (Macionis, 2001). Using social networking sites, such as Facebook, helps create social capital (Foley & Edwards, 1999; Woolcock, 1998). Social capital theory states that the personal relationships one has can be used to achieve some desirable outcome. It is important to note that the social movements explored in this study did not exist before Facebook. The social networking site provided the motivated individuals with an avenue to share opinions, stories, and information. As uses and gratifications theory states, people choose particular media to fulfill certain needs and will utilize that media in a way most beneficial to them (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). Prior studies have found several gratifications associated with Facebook use including content gratification, communication, surveillance (Joinson, 2008), making new friendships, keeping in contact with old friends, or using Facebook as a marketing or promotional tool (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). Facebook was selected by the participants because they were familiar with it

as a communications tool, noticed that other organizations were successful using it to reach audience members, and it was free.

In addition to Facebook, participants used other different communication channels to promote their social movements. Many of these, such as Twitter, blogs, and websites, are computer technology-based and the theory of computer-mediated communication recognizes that these technologies can be used to build social relationships (Jones, 1995). The participants said these communication channels were chosen based on their ability to provide awareness, help increase memberships within the groups, share information about the cause, and allow people to have a central place to discuss topics and issues. Participants said they believed their Facebook groups are effectively reaching their audience members and providing beneficial information related to the social movements they are promoting.

Based on the findings from this research, it would be in the best interest of agricultural communicators to utilize Facebook, along with other social media tools, to communicate agricultural issues to the public, and to promote social movements. Facebook reaches a large audience and has the capability to disseminate information at an extremely efficient rate. It is a free tool that does not have any sign-up or annual fees. Others who are considering using Facebook should follow best practices for using this communication tool. (Additional data were collected from these participants regarding these best practices; this information will be provided in another manuscript.)

The purpose for this study was to gain insight into how agricultural communicators are utilizing Facebook to promote social movements. Because the use of social media is still relatively new, additional research is needed to determine why people are using it, and how to effectively market a group or cause through Facebook or other social media tools. It would be useful to gain updated information on computer-mediated communication (CMC) and to explain the effects of why people use this particular form of media to interact with one another. If it was better understood why people use social media and what they are hoping to gain from their experiences, future communicators can more effectively target their messages to their audience segments.

The participants made assumptions about what their audience members wanted or needed in regard to information, but a better understanding of their audience members would further improve the effectiveness of their communication efforts. A quantitative survey with people who are members in these Facebook groups should be conducted to help determine why people use it and what benefits they gain by engaging in Facebook. This study should also explore the types of groups or fan pages people join and why they join them. The question is raised as to whether people who join these groups are really a fan of the group, or if they have other motivations for joining. An example of this would be if people joined a group simply because their friends were joining the group. By conducting research with the members of the group, it would help identify the users and gratifications of the members based on their own perceptions and experiences.

Social movements in agriculture have existed for centuries; the use of social networking sites to influence social change is a relatively new undertaking. It was apparent from this study that Facebook allowed these movements to exist, which is in itself, evidence of the significant impact this social networking site has had in today's society. Additional research and development of best practices will further refine the use of social networking sites to encourage desired changes in many areas, including agriculture.

About the Authors

Mica Graybill-Leonard completed her master's degree in agricultural communications at Texas Tech University in December 2010. She is currently a sales representative for Eli Lilly and Company. Courtney Meyers is an assistant professor in agricultural communications at Texas Tech University along with David Doerfert, professor in agricultural communications, and Erica Irlbeck, assistant professor in agricultural communications.

References

Anderson-Wilk, M. (2009). Changing the engines of change: Natural resource conservation in the era of social media. *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation*, *64*(4), 129A-131A.

Blumler, J., & Katz, E. (1974). *The uses of mass communications: Current perspectives on gratifications research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer–Mediated Communication*, *13(1)*, 1-11.

Bradshaw, L. (2009, May 20). Re: 6 tips for using social media in the agriculture industry [Web log message]. Retrieved from http://nms.com/blog/post/6-tips-for-using-social-media-in-the-agriculture-industry/

Brogan, C. (2010). *Social media 101: Tactics and tips to develop your business online*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Bumgarner, B. A. (2007). You have been poked: Exploring the uses and gratifications of Facebook among emerging adults. *First Monday*, *12*(11), 1-17.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Doerfert, D. L. (Ed.) (2011). *National research agenda: American Association for Agricultural Education's research priority areas for 2011-2015*. Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University, Department of Agricultural Education and Communications.

Experian Marketing Services (2010). *The 2010 digital marketer: Benchmark & trend report*. Schaumburg, IL.

Foley, M., & Edwards, B. (1999). Is it time to disinvest in social capital? *Journal of Public Policy, 19*(2), 141-173.

Fulk, J. & Collins-Jarvis, L. (2001). Wired meetings: Technological mediation of organizational gatherings. In L.L. Putnam & F.M. Jablins (Eds.), *New handbook of organizational communication* (2nd ed., pp. 624-703). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Gerlach, L. P., & Hine, V. H. (1970). *People, power, change: Movements of social transformation*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.

Hest, D. (2008, January 1). Re: Google maps for the farm [Web log message]. Retrieved from http://farmindustrynews.com/shop-office/farm-recordkeeping/google_maps_farm/

Hoffman, A. (2009, July 20). Re: Social media bridges consumer-producer gap [Web log message]. Retrieved from http://www.fb.org/index.php?fuseaction=newsroom.focusfocus&year=2009&file=fo0720.html

Joinson, A. N. (2008, April). *Looking at, looking up or keeping up with people: Motives and use of Facebook*. Paper presented at the Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI), Florence, Italy. Abstract retrieved from http://www.mendeley.com/research/looking-at-looking-up-or-keeping-up-with-people-motives-and-use-of-facebook/

Jones, S. G. (1995). Understanding community in the information age. In S.G. Jones (Ed.) *Cyberso-ciety – computer-mediated communication and community* (pp. 10-35). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kabani, S. H. (2010). *The zen of social media marketing.* Dallas, TX: BenBella Books.

Katz, E., Blumler, G., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). Uses and gratifications research. *The Public Opinion Quarterly, 37*(4), 509-23.

King, D. (2003). Communicators as architects of change. *Journal of Applied Communications, 87*(1), 39-41.

McHale, J. (2004). *Communicating for change*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Morse, J. M., & Richards, L. (2002). *ReadMe first for a user's guide to qualitative methods*. London: Sage Publications.

Narayan, D. (1999). Bonds and bridges: social capital and poverty. In J. Isham, T. Kelly, S. Ramas-wamy (Eds.), *Social capital and economic development: Well-being in developing countries* (pp. 58-81). Washington DC: The World Bank.

Park, N., Kee, K. F., & Valenzuela, S. (2009, December). Being immersed in social networking en-vironments: Facebook groups, uses and gratifications, and social outcomes. *Cyber Psychology & Behavior, 12(6).* Retrieved on March 26, 2010 from www.liebertonline.com/toc/cpb/010

Raacke, J., & Bonds-Raacke, J. (2008). MySpace and Facebook: Applying the uses and gratifica-tions theory to exploring friend-networking sites. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 11, 169-74.

Rogers, E.M. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Free Press.

Roth, C., Vogt, W., & Weinheimer, L. (2002). Joint effort boosts APS' benefits. *AgriMarketing, 40(7)*, 4-5.

Sato, Y. (2006). *Intentional social change: A rational choice theory*. Burwood, Victoria, Australia: BPA Print Group.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Woolcock, M. (1998). Social capital and economic development: Toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework. *Theory and Society*, *27*, 151-208.

Woolcock, M., & Narayan, D. (2000). Social capital: Implications for development theory, research and policy. *World Bank Research Observer, 15*(2), 225-49.